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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000444

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: PM SORO REITERATES VIABILITY OF ELECTIONS IN
NOVEMBER 2009

REF: ABIDJAN 411

Classified By: Ambassador Wanda Nesbitt for Reasons 1/4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Soro told Ambassador July 15 that elections will be held as scheduled on November 29, despite widespread skepticism. He deplored the cost of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), and insisted that the process must come to an end. Unlike key political party representatives, Soro does not expect a significant battle over the electoral list, in part because he intends to have his own staff resolve obviously suspicious cases prior to publication of the provisional list. This is a new -- and potentially very controversial -- element in the vetting process that could have serious repercussions in the months ahead. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador called on PM Soro to discuss the status of electoral preparations and to urge that the CEI publish an electoral timeline as soon as possible. She noted that there are serious doubts about the elections given the lack of clarity about how the government plans to complete the long list of actions (see ref A) necessary for an election to take place in November, just 3-4 months away. The Prime Minister said he was well aware of the skepticism but that the doubters "would see". He was categorical in stating that the enrollment phase has ended and will not be extended. The CEI will now turn to compiling the electoral list. Soro also expressed great frustration over the cost of the electoral process, singling out the CEI as an institution that has already cost the GOCI far too much. Soro made a point of indicating that neither he nor President Gbagbo want the CEI to continue devouring funds.

FOCUS SHIFTS TO ELECTORAL LIST

¶3. (C) Soro said his approach has always been to take things one step at a time and that the electoral list was now his focus. He confirmed that the CEI would start computerizing and cross-checking data on July 20. He did not foresee difficulty in securing the consent of the main political parties to the 12 historical documents that are to be merged into a single database and against which all names will be checked. Soro seemed more concerned that the process move forward rapidly so that the distribution of ID and voter registration cards could begin. He thought this would shore up confidence in the process and be a tangible sign of the government's good faith.

¶4. (C) PM Soro reasoned that it should be relatively easy to identify individuals who registered during the current identification process and were also on the 2000 electoral list. As the main political parties have already vetted and agreed that anyone whose name appears on the final 2000 electoral list will be considered an Ivorian citizen, Soro speculated that it should be "easy" for this category of persons to be identified and immediately issued ID/voter registration cards. Soro said he intends to ask Sagem to issue these cards immediately, to shore up confidence in the

process while the verification of the citizenship of the remaining names on the list continues. The Prime Minister hoped this approach would simplify the verification process; an enrollee whose father or mother is in possession of a new ID/voter card will more easily be able to prove his/her citizenship.

PM's OFFICE TO HELP RESOLVE POTENTIALLY CONTENTIOUS CASES

15. (C) Echoing a view expressed some weeks ago by the Secretary General of the PDCI (Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire) Soro told Ambassador that he does not agree with those who foresee a battle over the electoral list. However, this view was based on an intent to have the Primatur staff "do an initial review" of potentially contentious cases. Asked to give a specific example, Soro described a hypothetical situation in which someone who had registered to vote using an Ivorian birth certificate was also found to have once been issued a temporary resident card -- a document only given to foreigners. The PM envisioned cases of this nature being separated out and given to his staff to try to resolve. Ambassador wondered what the volume of cases in this category might amount to and whether the PM's relatively small staff would be sufficient to resolve them all within six weeks (the timeframe normally cited for vetting the enrollment list and issuing a provisional electoral list.) Soro did not give a figure and did not appear to have given close attention to the details of how such an operation would work. Moreover, he gave no indication that those who will be most directly affected by this new process (i.e. the political parties and their voters) had been consulted.

ABIDJAN 00000444 002 OF 002

16. (C) Ambassador also inquired about deployment of the mixed brigades slated to provide security for the election. Soro replied a bit cautiously that there were still some issues to be resolved and that he was to meet with General Bakayoko (Chief of Staff of the Forces Nouvelles) in a day or two to work things out.

17. (C) Comment: The Prime Minister seemed quite focused on steps he could take to speed up the electoral process, reflecting both a genuine frustration with the slow pace at which the CEI is moving, and an ongoing determination to escape blame if the elections ultimately are postponed. At the same time, it was quite clear that Soro and his staff had not thought through the ramifications of an improvised solution to the need to resolve contentious cases quickly, such as having his staff become directly involved in efforts to determine citizenship. It is an excellent example of how Ivoirians can, when they need to, bend the rules to fit their needs, but also an example of the huge gap that remains between the political and the technical levels. Poor planning at the technical level often appears to limit the options of those higher up, while political decisions continue to be taken without a full understanding of the technical capacity required for implementation. This problem is not unique to Cote d'Ivoire but could well be a determining factor in the presidential election. End Comment
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